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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Woman Sentenced to Jail for Forgery in Real Estate Fraud

(Phoenix, Ariz. – Jan. 17, 2006) Victoria Marie Cervantes of Phoenix, a former escrow officer for First Financial Title Agency of Arizona, Inc., was sentenced today to three months in jail, four years of supervised probation, and 200 hours of community service. Restitution will be determined at a hearing on February 24.

Cervantes, 40, was sentenced by Maricopa County Superior Court Judge Brian R. Hauser after pleading guilty to forgery. The Court also revoked her notary public license.

She is one of four defendants indicted by the State Grand Jury in July 2005 on charges of alleged fraud, forgery, and false identities in 10 home-sale transactions. The defendants included real estate agent Carmen Cantu, real estate broker Betty Barbee, loan officer Frank Martinez and escrow officer Cervantes. The fraudulent activity was generally designed to hide the true identity and bad credit history of the actual home buyer. Cantu and his wife, Barbee, were accused of stealing monies that were owed in real estate transactions.

Barbee and Cantu formerly operated Profile Real Estate Services & Investments at 2525 W. Greenway Road in Phoenix. Barbee pleaded guilty to presentment of a false instrument for filing (by falsely notarizing a signature on a warranty deed), and was sentenced Jan. 10 by Hauser to two years of supervised probation, a \$1,000 fine, and 100 hours of community service. Restitution in Barbee's case will be determined at a hearing on February 24. The court also revoked her real estate license and notary public license.

Cantu is scheduled to be sentenced January 26 after pleading guilty to fraudulent schemes and artifices, and forgery. He faces up to 16 years in prison. Martinez, formerly employed by Security Mortgage Corporation, is scheduled to be sentenced on February 2 after pleading guilty to forgery. He faces up to 3.75 years in prison.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant Attorney General Ted Noyes and followed a joint investigation by Arizona Department of Real Estate Investigator Henry Soza and Attorney General's Office Investigator Roberto Rivera.

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